

The Statues That Walked: Unraveling the Mystery of Easter Island, by Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo. London: Free Press, 2011. ISBN cloth, 978-1-4391-5031-3; eBook, 978-1-4391-5434-2; xii + 244 pages, maps, appendix, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$26.00; eBook, US\$12.99.

The Statues That Walked: Unraveling the Mystery of Easter Island provides a new set of hypotheses and discussions pertaining to Rapa Nui, also known as Easter Island. Published by the Free Press, the book is intended for a lay audience with limited knowledge of Rapa Nui and Pacific Island prehistory, but it also contains summaries of research and theories that would be of interest to regional historians, archaeologists, and ecologists. The main premise of the book is that many of the “popular” accounts of Rapa Nui—in particular the view that the island hosted a large, stratified population that outstripped the resources of the island, ultimately dooming it to conflict and famine (as suggested in Jared Diamond’s 2004 book *Collapse*)—are misconceptions based on limited data and erroneous reconstructions of the island’s ecology, demography, and history of colonization. Authors Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo put forward a series of arguments for a much different vision of Rapa Nui prehistory—one in which the Rapanui people successfully managed the resources of their island and utilized a variety of agricultural and social innovations (including the building and moving of the massive moai [stone statues]) in order to persist as a population. According to Hunt and Lipo, true demographic

“collapse” and social disruption only occurred after contact with Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

For scholars who are familiar with Pacific Island prehistory, the authors describe the Rapanui as an island population that is culturally East Polynesian and employs cultural traditions and technologies that are closely related to practices found elsewhere in the region. They also make ecological connections to other Pacific Islands that, like Rapa Nui, experienced changes in plants, animals, and local geology as a result of human colonization and the introduction of commensal species. They then examine the prehistory of Rapa Nui through a series of chapters that focus on three main issues: the hypothesized destruction of the island’s environment and the resource base for the population; the social context of moai construction and transport; and evolutionary explanations for moai construction by the Rapanui and for the loss of moai following European contact.

Hunt and Lipo summarize their own decade of research on the island, as well as the published works of others, to support each of their claims. To parry Diamond’s claims of deforestation as a result of overpopulation and statue construction, Hunt and Lipo put forward evidence of gradual forest decline and the impact of rat predation and human-induced environmental change. In taking on the hypothesis that the loss of the forest produced impoverished and exhausted soil, they describe recent studies of sediment biogeochemistry and rock mulching on Rapa Nui that indicate that the agricultural practices actu-

ally improved the productivity of the island's soils and allowed for more extensive agricultural production across the island.

The authors also address several issues related to moai construction, distribution, and movement and argue that the remains of these features are indicative of a prehistoric social structure that was composed of local communities. Features that may represent pathways or "roads" are described, as are previous experiments that have sought to explain how the moai were transported. Hunt and Lipo describe their own study of moai distribution on the island and the physical qualities of the statues (eg, their height and center of gravity) to suggest that the moai were "walked" in a standing position by small teams of people from the quarry to their ahu (ritual platform) sites. The position of abandoned moai along the pathways is employed as evidence of their having fallen while walking to their destinations.

In the final section of the book, Hunt and Lipo provide models derived from evolutionary theory to argue that the prehistoric Rapanui population benefited from a strategy of peaceful interaction and moai production. Mata'a lithics (obsidian blades), which in previous literature were described as weapons, are instead argued to have been agricultural tools. Moai construction is suggested to have emerged as a beneficial strategy for the population, as it diverted energy away from reproduction and population growth. Hunt and Lipo argue that in this way (and perhaps unknowingly), the Rapanui managed to maintain a delicate balance between population growth and the food resources of

the island. This system was resilient and long-lived and only unraveled as a result of European contact. The introduction of new goods is proposed to have transformed concepts of prestige on the island, resulting in the abandonment of moai. Later effects of disease and deportation produced the final catastrophic "collapse" of the society.

One of the major strengths of this book is its concise and easy-flowing prose, which is very accessible to lay readers and scholars alike. The inclusion of many historical anecdotes also adds detail and depth to the story of Rapa Nui, and the bibliography, appendixes, and moderate number of footnotes are useful tools for additional reading or study. One noticeable problem for the authors is the reporting of research that has not been published or fully documented in a report or paper (peer-reviewed or otherwise). For example, Hunt and Lipo discuss their excavations of Anakena (12–15), surveys of manavai (enclosed gardens) (40), and analyses of the center of mass for moai (88), but they do not support these with references to primary data or published works. With no opportunity to evaluate their data or analyses, we have to take their word for what they claim. For the lay reader this is not problematic, but for other archaeologists who work in the region, this practice serves to isolate Rapa Nui from larger debates and studies of Pacific prehistory. Hunt and Lipo claim that the research they describe in *The Statues that Walked* overturns previously accepted hypotheses of Rapa Nui, and perhaps it does. However, many scholars will not be satisfied with the synthetic

description the text provides and will wish to see more of the proof behind its claims.

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The Other Side: Ways of Being and Place in Vanuatu, by John Patrick Taylor. Pacific Islands Monograph Series 22. Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai'i, and University of Hawai'i Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8248-3302-2, xiv + 238 pages, maps, table, figures (photographs, diagrams, drawings), notes, glossary, references, index. Cloth, US\$52.00.

John Patrick Taylor's *The Other Side: Ways of Being and Place in Vanuatu* is a welcome contribution to the anthropological literature of the Pacific. In the six chapters (plus prologue and epilogue) that make up the book, Taylor sets out to explore "ways of being and place" among the Sia Raga people of north Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, a hitherto relatively little-studied region of the archipelago. The book is well written, well researched, and ambitious in theoretical scope. For example, Taylor incorporates his insights about the ways in which the Sia Raga perceive their world and their place in it into broader anthropological discussions about the relationship between history and structure, and between cultural categories and practice. Taylor's work should thus also appeal to a wider readership interested in anthropological (and historical) concerns and debates not limited to the Pacific region.

Taylor draws heavily on his 1999–2000 doctoral research in north Pentecost to develop the book's central thesis. He argues that there is a recurring structural similarity perceptible across the Sia Raga cultural landscape, a "basic analogical pattern" through which the Sia Raga "locate their sociological and cosmological understandings in space and time" (4). Taylor identifies in particular two guiding principles that he sees repeatedly giving shape to Sia Raga thought, expression, practice, and material design: the processes of trajectory (movement) and division (splitting), and the division of the world into multiple dualities or "sides," each engaged in creative tension with its partnered other. Taylor sees these principles expressed in the shared shapes and tropes of historical and cosmological narratives and diagrams, sand drawings, textile designs, kinship relationships and practices, the organization of space and living habitats, and the architecture of "men's houses" and ordinary dwellings.

Taylor is careful to acknowledge early and often the seductive yet misleading power of such conceptual structures—how they seem "to say at once everything and nothing" (108). The elegant outlines in diagrams will inevitably blur in practice. Taylor claims to only understand the recurring patterns he sees as elusive, partial forms, "being at parts overdrawn and at others incomplete" (5). Yet he also convincingly sustains a book-long argument that these perceptible but always-elusive conceptual structures are made importantly manifest in Sia Raga thoughts, expressions, and actions, often self-consciously so.